

NEW SALEM STREET MARK
(THEFT OF KEYS)

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NEW SALEM

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Illinois New Salem

Theft of Relics

Excerpts from newspapers and other sources

From the files of the
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

State Officials Act on Thefts of Relics at New Salem Park

BY WILLIAM JONES

[Chicago Tribune Press Service]

Springfield, Ill., April 24—State conservation officials today announced they will reorganize operations at New Salem state park after disclosures of wholesale thefts of early American relics from the Abraham Lincoln shrine.

"The conditions uncovered and exposed by THE TRIBUNE and Better Government association are indefensible," said David L. Malkovich, assistant director of the Illinois conservation department.

"There are many problems in the department that we have uncovered and we are moving as fast as possible to correct them. But New Salem is one of our most important historical sites and we are going to move immediately to correct the situation," he said.

Rutherford Orders Action

Malkovich acted at the direction of William Rutherford, who was appointed director of conservation less than three months ago by Gov. Ogilvie.

Rutherford said he was "aghast" at the widespread theft of Lincoln art treasures and pledged "full and immediate prosecution of those responsible." Rutherford is seeking undercover state investigators to probe the theft of hundreds of priceless antiques from the state park.

THE TRIBUNE disclosed that the park has been looted of hundreds of its pioneer relics, many of which were donated to the Lincoln memorial by descendants of early Illinois settlers.

The disclosures include ad-

missions from park officials that they don't know what happened to firearms, power horns, surgical instruments, furniture, and other items donated to the park. Investigators visiting the shrine also discovered an 1834 Bible chewed to shreds by mice, and other documents and books ruined by a leaky roof.

John Schulte, historian of state memorials, headquartered in the park, said he does not know how many relics have been stolen or destroyed because no inventory has been made in more than 20 years. He said he ordered an inventory at New Salem three years ago but it has not been completed.

Malkovich Vows Changes

When questioned by a reporter and B. G. A. investigators, Schulte termed the inquiry "a form of harassment." He blamed some of the thefts on vandals.

"This is the first time this inventory problem has been brought to my attention and frankly I can't understand why it would take more than three years," said Malkovich. "I can

promise you some changes will be made in this area."

Rudy Dorner, acting superintendent of the division of parks and memorials in the conservation department, announced the first of a series of closed-door meetings today aimed at reorganizing the administration of the state park.

Division of Authority

"We've had divided authority out there for some time and it has made management of this site tremendously difficult," said Dorner. "We are taking steps to correct this immediately at the order of Director Rutherford."

The theft disclosures come at the beginning of the tourist season that attracts more than one million visitors yearly to the reconstructed pioneer village where Lincoln worked as a surveyor and storekeeper before leaving to serve in the state legislature.

SCOTT ASKED TO JOIN STATE RELICS PROBE

BY WILLIAM JONES

(Chicago Tribune Press Service)

Springfield, Ill., April 26—State Rep. Christian Homeier [R., Springfield], disclosed today he has asked Atty. Gen. William Scott to enter the investigation of missing Lincoln era relics from New Salem state park.

Homeier, who said he conducted his own inventory of relics at the Lincoln shrine two weeks ago and found many missing, said he also will ask the state Senate conservation committee to schedule hearings into the problems faced by the state's 51 parks and 29 memorials.

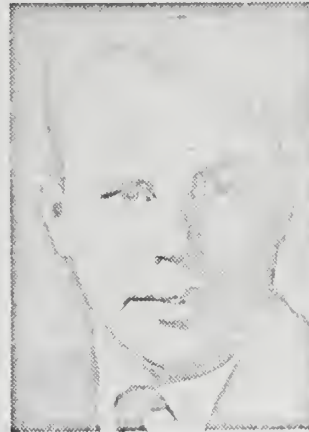
Tells Reason for Request

Homeier said he wants the attorney general's office represented at the beginning of the investigation "in the event there is evidence that state employees are involved in any thefts."

"At that point the attorney general would be in a position to take immediate action to prosecute," said Homeier. "We've permitted this fine memorial to Lincoln to be stripped of its most priceless relics and the tragedy is that we may never recover what is missing."

"I think a legislative inquiry is needed to determine what the conservation department needs in the way of security and funds to prevent this sort of thing from happening again."

Homeier acted following disclosures by THE TRIBUNE and Better Government asso-



Rep. Christian Homeier

ciation that the Lincoln memorial park 24 miles northwest of Springfield has been looted of many relics donated to the state by descendants of Illinois settlers.

Audit is Ordered

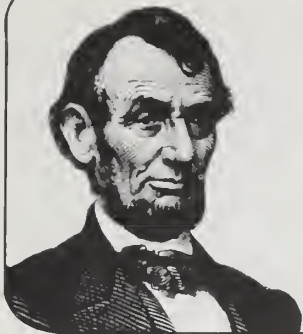
A task force of investigators from the conservation and finance departments has been ordered into the park by conservation officials with orders to audit every item listed in the park's records.

David L. Malkovich, assistant director of conservation, said the inventory is the first in a sweeping series of inventories to be conducted at all state memorials. He said the New Salem investigation is expected to take a week.

The audit is the first to be held in the park in more than 20 years, according to conservation officials.

The state supported facility includes 12 timber cabins, a tavern and shops and is the site of the original village where Lincoln worked as a surveyor and storekeeper before leaving to serve in the state legislature. More than one million persons a year visit the state shrine.

Chicago Tribune,
April 27, 1969



Lincoln Lore

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Mary Jane Hubler, Editorial Assistant. Published each month by the
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Number 1715

The Political Life Of New Salem, Illinois

Lincoln's earliest political surroundings have always somewhat baffled scholars. The reasons for this are many and varied. Inadequate documentation and Whiggery's marginal existence as almost a subculture in Democratic Illinois are two factors. A third, perhaps more important, is the unpopularity of the Whig party among historians. Much of the best work on Lincoln was produced at a time when historians were prejudiced against the Whigs. Most writers liked Lincoln well enough, but they disliked the party to which he devoted the greater part of his political life (he was a Whig twice as long as he was a Republican).

Only recently have historians come to have a greater appreciation for the importance, one might almost say the vision, of the Whig party. G.S. Boritt comes immediately to mind for those who work in the Lincoln field, but there are others, such as Daniel Walker Howe, who have been giving the Whigs a fairer shake. This new work has gained attention and made historians think. It has not yet stemmed the tide, and more students should be reevaluating Lincoln's early political environment.

All in all, the effect of the modern unpopularity of Whiggery on the study of Lincoln's early career has been to keep the number of such studies small and to emphasize Lincoln's personal popularity. Nowhere has this emphasis been more pronounced than in the work on Lincoln in New Salem.

Studies of New Salem rarely focus on the political life of the town in which Lincoln forged his early career. Historians have generally shied away from characterizing the town as Whig or Democratic. Most say only that it was democratic (with a small "d") and that this openness accounts for

Lincoln's opportunity to have a political career despite his "defective" education, his inability to settle into a successful vocation, and his penniless and debt-ridden economic status. The beginnings of Lincoln's career in the Illinois legislature seem to represent a triumph of personal popularity and of the American political system. That it was also a triumph of one political party over another rarely gains mention, much less careful consideration.

Here inadequate documentation is *not* a problem. The opportunity to understand Lincoln's political career before the 1850s is probably greater than for any other of America's political giants. Illinois's voters showed their preference at the polls orally, and clerks carefully marked how each citizen voted. Therefore, we know in Lincoln's case precisely—by name—who voted for him and against him. Knowledge like this is unobtainable even for twentieth-century politicians or contemporary elections. We know for sure who voted for Lincoln, something we can never know in the cases of Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt, or even Ronald Reagan.

Who Voted for Lincoln?

The records do not exist for every precinct in every election, but a substantial number have survived. The poll books for the election of August 1, 1836, in New Salem precinct still exist. Lincoln was running for reelection to the Illinois House of Representatives. Sangamon County, of which New Salem was still a part, was to choose seven Representatives, and each voter could vote for as many as seven House candidates. Voters also chose a Congressman, a state senator, and

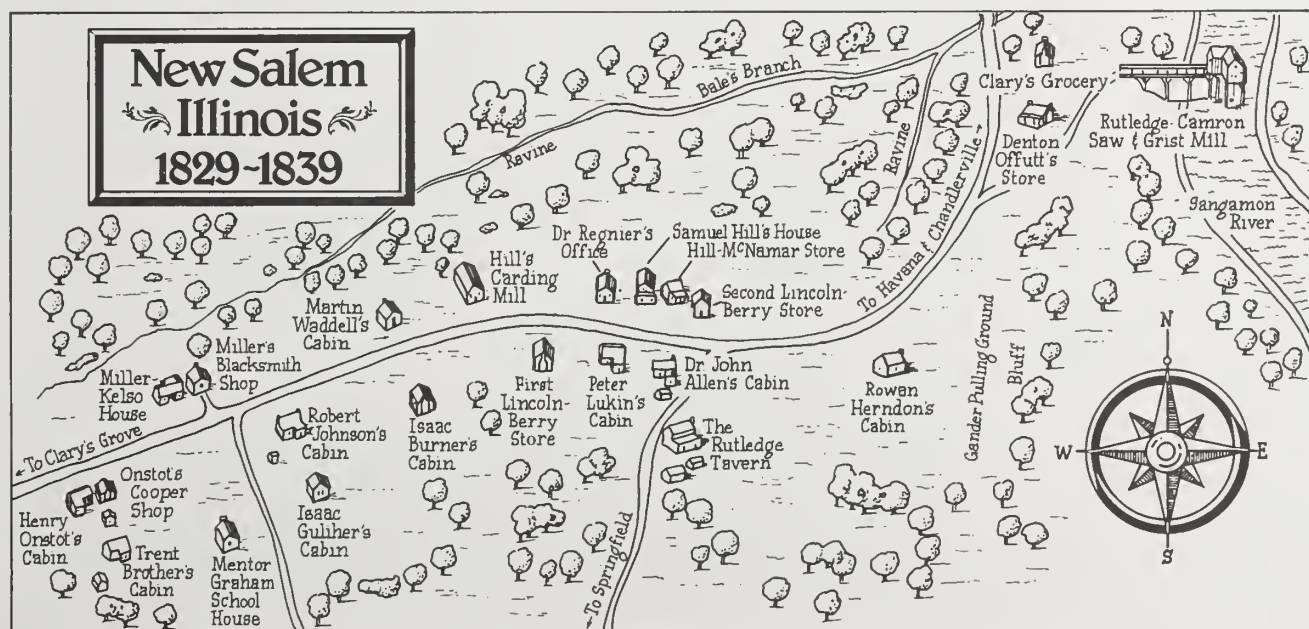


FIGURE 1. Map of Lincoln's home town from 1831 to 1837.

From the Louis A. Warren
Lincoln Library and Museum

various county officials. For this election, incidentally, there were two New Salem precinct polling places, a fact not previously mentioned in the literature. Only one of them was in tiny New Salem proper. The other was outside of the town, probably to the west and perhaps to the northwest. Both polling places drew voters from a wide area, and the polling place in New Salem itself attracted many more than the 25 to 50 voters who lived in the town.

The New Salem poll books show that it was a Whig town. John Todd Stuart, the Whig candidate for the United States House of Representatives, gained 86 votes to Democrat William L. May's 59. In the race for the state senate, Whig Job Fletcher outpolled Democrat Moses K. Anderson 73 to 67. In the races for the lower house, five of the seven Whigs gained more votes than any Democrat. Lincoln led the pack with a whopping 107 votes from the 145 voters who came to the polling place. He was followed by William Elkin with 84, Ninian W. Edwards with 84, John Dawson with 82, Dan Stone with 81, Robert L. Wilson with 69, and Andrew McCormick with 67. Lincoln students, of course, recognize these as members of the Long Nine. Thomas Wynne led the unsuccessful Democrats with 71 votes. He was a local man, and no other Democrat topped any Whig's votes in New Salem.

Thus the New Salem poll books also reveal Lincoln's immense local personal popularity, a factor properly noted by historians of the past. One should not ignore the partisan cast of New Salem, however. The peculiar system of voting on many candidates to represent Sangamon County in the legislature allowed for considerable ticket-splitting. Likewise, the rather tentative nature of party formation in Illinois at this date meant that the discipline or regularity of the voters was weaker than it would be in the 1840s, when ticket-splitting became rare. Richard P. McCormick, the outstanding expert on the formation of the Whig and Democratic parties characterizes the party situation in Illinois before 1835 as "chaos." Preparation for the 1836 Presidential election served to coalesce the voters somewhat and saw the Democrats institute a convention system for nominations. The opposition to the Democrats was still only loosely organized and did not put together a modern party organization until about 1840. Thus the degree of party regularity in New Salem was substantial under the conditions. One might say that in 1836 there were about 80 Whigs and about 60 Democrats.

Modern-day visitors to New Salem State Park might get a new feeling about the quaint pioneer village as they meander through it by keeping in mind the Whiggish cast of the town itself. Of course, the reconstructed village does not represent the town at one particular time. It represents a sort of average of a six-year period. Different people lived in the log houses at different times, and it is not possible to identify the politics of all its inhabitants.

Nevertheless, entering the village from the west, one first

encounters Henry Onstot's cabin. In 1836 he voted for Stuart, Lincoln, and the other six Whig candidates for the lower house. The Trent brothers' cabin to the south was full of Democrats. Alexander, Henry, and William Trent voted for May and, with one exception, for the Democratic candidates for the lower house. Alexander Trent, a veteran of Lincoln's company in the Black Hawk War, split his ticket to vote for his old captain. Joshua Miller and John A. "Jack" Kelso married sisters and lived in a double house north of Onstot's cooper shop. Both men were Whigs. Martin Waddell, the hatter, lived next door to Miller's blacksmith shop. Waddell was also a Whig. To the south of these residences lay Robert Johnson's cabin, Isaac Guliher's cabin, and Mentor Graham's schoolhouse. Johnson, a wheelwright and cabinetmaker, voted Whig. Guliher did not vote; perhaps he had moved on from New Salem. Graham lived outside town, but he came to town to vote for Stuart, Lincoln, and five Whig candidates for the lower house. He also voted for Thomas Wynne, a Democrat, for the state legislature.

Isaac Burner did not vote in New Salem in 1836. Alexander Ferguson, who had succeeded Peter Lukins as the local shoemaker, was a Democrat. The town's leading businessman Samuel Hill, Dartmouth-educated Dr. John Allen, and Dr. Francis Regnier were Whigs. The rest of the cabins on the east side of town were shops except the old Herndon cabin, the occupants of which in 1836 are unknown.

The Myth of the Clary's Grove Boys

The other New Salem precinct in 1836 was less solidly Whig. Lincoln got 50 of its 76 votes, but May edged Stuart, 40 to 34. In this area of Sangamon County, Lincoln's personal popularity did triumph over local political preference. The names of the voters at this unlocated poll include many of those associated with the Clary's Grove, Concord, and Sandridge areas.

A special mythology surrounds these residents of New Salem's outskirts. The "Clary's Grove boys," as they are called, were representatives of what some historians call the



*From the Louis A. Warren
Lincoln Library and Museum*

FIGURE 2. Joshua Miller's reconstructed blacksmith shop in New Salem.

first frontier. They were rough, fun-loving, and boisterous men of rather unsteady habits. Lincoln, the artisans, doctors, and businessmen of New Salem were men of the more settled second frontier. Lincoln's ability to capture the friendship of the Clary's Grove boys has always gained considerable attention from his biographers. First, it really was important. As members of his company in the Black Hawk War in 1832, the Clary's Grove boys had a hand in Lincoln's first political success: his election as captain of the unit. Second, the way he gained their respect—the famous wrestling match with Jack Armstrong—is the anecdotal stuff of which readable biographies are made. Unlike some important events, this one offers the bonus of making a good story.

Finally, Lincoln's friendship with the Clary's Grove boys has been the focus of much attention because of the peculiar importance of the American West to historians in the period when much of the great writing on Lincoln occurred. In the 1890s, Frederick Jackson Turner's "frontier thesis" identified American democracy and individualism with the West. The frontier was supposed to be the cutting edge of the experience that made America, America and not a pale imitation of the European culture from which most Americans stemmed. For Lincoln to capture the hearts and minds of the Clary's Grove boys was vital to the process by which he maintained his status as the ideal American statesman to most historians. This showed that, despite Lincoln's choice of the law as a vocation and his political and personal friendships with bankers and businessmen, he was linked to the vital experience that forged American democracy.

Scholarship has moved on since those times, and the frontier experience has greatly diminished in importance in the works of American history. The residue of this once important story remains in Lincoln biographies. Oscar and Lilian Handlin's recent *Abraham Lincoln and the Union* notes that Lincoln was "Equally at ease with the boys in the Clary's Grove gang and with the Reverend Cameron." A more important book, Stephen B. Oates's fine *With Malice Toward None: The Life of Abraham Lincoln*, carries the idea a bit farther. Describing Lincoln's campaign for the legislature in 1836, Oates says, "On the campaign trail, Jack Armstrong and the Clary Grove boys sang Lincoln's praises and helped keep order at his political rallies." Oates merely states explicitly what is implied in most of the Lincoln literature that preceded his book.

Jack Armstrong may have campaigned in 1836, but he did not vote, either in the state election in August or in the national election in November. And the Clarys were certainly Democrats. John, Spencer, and Zack Clary voted in the New Salem precinct in 1836. Spencer and Zack voted for William L. May and for the seven Democrats seeking seats in the Illinois House. John Clary split his ticket, voting for Stuart, Lincoln, and three other Whig aspirants to the legislature as well as for four Democrats running for the legislature. The Clarys voted in the poll outside New Salem. The other families associated with the Clarys have never been precisely identified, and the Clarys and Armstrongs may not have spoken for all the "boys." Nevertheless, this is not the stuff of which loyal campaign workers are made, and it seems almost certain that the Armstrongs and Clarys were no part of Lincoln's canvass for the Illinois House of Representatives in 1836. Politically, Lincoln was much more at home on the streets of New Salem than in Clary's Grove.

Whigs and Democrats in the Developing West

New Salem was solidly Whig. In the Presidential election the following November, the town's voters gave 65 votes to Hugh Lawson White and only 34 to Martin Van Buren (only one poll book for the precinct exists). Dr. Allen, Caleb Carman (at whose house, probably the Trents' former home, the poll was located), Robert Johnson, Jack Kelso, Lincoln, Joshua Miller, Dr. Regnier, and Martin Waddell voted for White. Alexander Ferguson and the Trents (who had apparently moved outside town) voted Democratic. Mentor Graham, who also resided outside New Salem, voted Whig.

Lincoln left New Salem for Springfield before the next election. In 1838 he again ran successfully for the Illinois legislature. New Salem had changed. Its citizens shared with most other residents of northwestern Sangamon County a



From the Louis A. Warren
Lincoln Library and Museum

FIGURE 3. New Yorker Martin Van Buren's lack of popularity in the West spurred Whig organization in 1836.

desire to form a new county with, of course, a new county seat. Lincoln and the rest of the Long Nine, busy with internal improvements bills and the drive to move the state capital to Springfield, were unresponsive. New Salem's residents registered their dismay at the polls in 1838. The Whigs lost ignominiously. Lincoln led the Whig candidates for the lower house of the legislature with a paltry 31 votes out of 122 (almost double the total of any other Whig candidate for the Illinois House but not even a third of what the Democratic candidates got). Even Lincoln's local popularity could not overcome the disappointment of New Salem's citizens. John Todd Stuart, who was immune from the county-division conflict in Washington, ran ahead of Lincoln with 39 votes but well behind his Democratic opponent, Stephen A. Douglas, who gained 81 votes. A few remained faithful to Lincoln (Waddell, Kelso, Carman, Miller, and Graham), but even they split their tickets, usually voting for Democrats for the other legislative seats. Feeling for division of the county all but obliterated party regularity.

Lincoln was gone from New Salem by then, and his popularity and that of the Whig party in the rest of Sangamon County swept him to victory anyway. It is the experience before 1838 that is important, and it really is important. This is not a quaint exercise meant to add some of the bright color of partisanship to your next tour of New Salem State Park, though lack of attention to party politics is a notable failing of historical reconstructions, which usually ignore partisanship for the sake of a bland patriotism. This is a step in the reconstruction of Lincoln's early political environment.

That environment is looking more Whiggish every day. We know that Lincoln's father was a Whig and that his cousin was a Whig. We now know that the village in which he chose to make his independent way in the world was Whig. There is no anomaly in Lincoln's affiliation with the Whig party. The tendency to associate the frontier with democracy and democracy with the Democratic party is a hangover from the days when the West was thought to be the key to the American experience. Lincoln was a son of America's frontier, all right, but the West was politically and socially complex. When Lincoln moved to New Salem, he left his Whig home for a Whig town.

Disclose Thefts at New Salem

BY WILLIAM JONES

(Chicago Tribune Press Service)

Springfield, Ill., April 23 —

The most comprehensive memorial ever erected to honor Abraham Lincoln is being looted of hundreds of priceless early American relics in a state park 24 miles northwest of here, a TRIBUNE investigation has disclosed.

The probe also uncovered evidence of neglect in the care of antique treasures donated to the state, including an 1834 Bible chewed to shreds by mice and a leaky roof that has virtually destroyed other books and ledgers and pioneer furniture from the 1830s.

Thoro Inquiry Sought

The officials of New Salem State park blame some of the losses on vandals, it was learned that the Illinois conservation direction, William Rutherford, is seeking undercover investigators to determine if there are other causes of the widespread thefts. Rutherford was named to the post less than three months ago.

The disclosures come at the beginning of the tourist season that each year attracts more than a million visitors to the reconstructed pioneer village where Lincoln worked as a surveyor and storekeeper before leaving to serve in the state legislature.

Inventory Not Finished

Park officials said they have no way of knowing how much of the collection of early American housewares, firearms, and documents may be missing because no inventory has been conducted in more than 20 years.



[TRIBUNE Staff Photo]

Bible dating from 1834, which was chewed to pieces by mice at New Salem state park.

Mrs. Eileen Altig, memorial custodian, said she began an inventory three years ago but has not had time to complete it. She said total losses at the state shrine may run to "several hundred items or so."

"I am astounded and shocked at the lack of concern and organization at this memorial," said George Bliss, director of investigations for the Better Government association, whose agency worked with THE TRIBUNE in its investigation. "Hundreds of historical pieces are obviously missing or reported destroyed and the park management hides behind the excuse that they have not had time to determine the losses."

"If I wasn't concerned I

wouldn't have ordered an inventory three years ago," said John Schulte, who took over as historian of state memorials three years ago. Schulte said he considered the inquiry by investigators "a form of harassment."

Might Still Find Some

"We're about half done with our inventory and I wouldn't want to say how much is missing because we still might find some of it," said Schulte. "The only thing I can say at the end of the inventory is this is what we found and this is what we didn't find. I'm convinced that most of what's missing was gone before I became historian."

Using the 1947 inventory list,

investigators questioned Mrs. Altig about missing surgical instruments, guns, powder horns, lamps, pewter ware, and other items from the Lincoln era. Mrs. Altig said: "I don't know what happened to it. I guess that's some of the stuff that's gone. Some of what we know is missing hasn't been reported to the state yet because we feel it might turn up."

Investigators also discovered an 1834 Bible printed in New York that had been chewed almost beyond recognition by mice. Two dead rodents remained in the midst of the shredded book in a drawer of a pioneer cabinet.

Leak Damages Books

In another cabin, water had poured thru a leaking roof onto stacks of century-old books and ledgers and warped the drawers of a dresser to the point where they could not be opened.

The state-supported park includes 12 timber cabins, a tavern, and shops and is considered the only memorial of its kind ever erected in honor of a great man.

Schulte said there have been several incidents of vandalism and theft by visitors in recent years and included at least one attempt by a woman to lift her child over a restraining gate to steal some pottery. He said he doesn't know how much of the thefts is by visitors.

"I've asked for more help and more security out here but I don't get it," said Schulte. "We can't keep track of these cabins without enough help."

Schulte also said none of the collection is insured.

